DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 281 138 CG 019 872

AUTHOR Schmedlen, George W.; And Others
TITLE Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Matching Sensory Predicates, and Rapport.
PUB DATE Apr 87
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Western Psychological Association (67th, Long Beach, CA, April 23-26, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Client Characteristics (Human Services); College Students; *Counseling Techniques; *Counselor Client Relationship; *Counselor Role; Higher Education; *Interpersonal Communication; *Neurolinguistics; Psychotherapy; *Rapport; Trust (Psychology)
IDENTIFIERS *Predicate Matching

ABSTRACT

A key task for the therapist in psychotherapy is to build trust and rapport with the client. Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) practitioners believe that matching the sensory modality (representational system) of a client's predicates (verbs, adverbs, and adjectives) improves rapport. In this study, 16 volunteer subjects participated in two sessions of analogue therapy. Clients were given two 30-minute sessions in which one of the four therapists systematically matched client predicates in one session and mismatched them during the other. At the end of each session, clients filled out Stiles' Session Evaluation Questionnaire and the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory Empathic Understanding Scale and Level of Regard Scale. Comparison of the means of the total match and mismatch samples through use of the correlated samples t-test revealed significant differences ($t=2.28$, $df=14$, $p<.05$) between groups on the Empathic Understanding Scale of the Barrett-Lennard, but not on the remaining measures. The findings fail to support the hypotheses in terms of increased perception of the therapist's Level of Regard or improved showing on the Depth/Value, Smoothness/Ease or Positive Feeling indices at the .05 level. The findings are interpreted as supporting the idea that systematic matching (versus mismatching) of a client's sensory predicates improves the client's perception of the empathic component of rapport in the therapist. A five-page reference list is appended. (Author/NB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED281138

Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Matching Sensory Predicates, and Rapport

by

George W. Schmedlen
Marymount Mental Health Center

Donald William McCormick
Organizational Psychology Program
California School of Professional Psychology - Los Angeles

and

Ansel L. Woldt
Counseling and Personnel Services Education
Kent State University

CG 019872

Paper presented at the Western Psychological Association Annual Meeting
Long Beach, California
April 23-26, 1987

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Donald W. McCormick

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Matching Sensory Predicates, & Rapport,
by George W. Schmedlen, Donald W. McCormick, & Ansel L. Woldt

ABSTRACT

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) practitioners believe that matching the sensory modality (representational system) of a client's predicates (verbs, adverbs and adjectives) improves rapport. In this study, 24 volunteer subjects participated in two sessions of analogue therapy. Clients were given two 30 minute sessions in which one of the four therapists systematically matched their predicates in one session and mismatched them during the other. At the end of each session, clients filled out Stiles' Session Evaluation Questionnaire and the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory Empathic Understanding Scale and Level of Regard Scale. Comparison of the means of the total match and mismatch samples through use of the correlated samples t-test revealed significant differences ($t=2.28$, $df=14$, $p<.05$) between groups on the Empathic Understanding Scale of the Barrett-Lennard, but not on the remaining measures. The findings fail to support the hypotheses in terms of increased perception of the therapist's Level of Regard or improved showing on the Depth/Value, Smoothness/Ease or Positive Feeling indices at the .05 level. Overall, we interpret our findings as supporting the idea that systematic matching (versus mismatching) a client's sensory predicates improves the client's perception of the empathic component of rapport in the therapist.

Neuro-Linguistic Programming, Matching Sensory Predicates, and Rapport

A key task in psychotherapy is building trust and rapport with the client. This is also important in areas beyond face-to-face therapy such as supervision, training, group facilitation, and organizational consultation (French & Bell, 1978).

This study examined the neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) approach to building rapport. According to NLP's founders, Grinder and Bandler (1976), people think primarily in visual, kinesthetic or auditory modes. These modes of thinking are called representational systems. The mode a person most prefers is called the Primary Representational System (PRS). The predicates (adjectives, adverbs and verbs) people use indicate the representational system they are using at any given moment. Using predicates that match the client's sensory mode serve, through greater ease of understanding and clarity, as a basis for the client's experience of rapport with the therapist. Conversely, mismatching predicates can cause misunderstanding or confusion.

NLP's model for rapport has been fiercely

debated in the research literature (McCormick, 1984). Some studies defend and others denounce the NLP model.

Among the defending studies is Falzett's (1981) which supports the idea that matching the subject's PRS improved rapport. Palubeckas (1981) found that matching predicates helped foster an initial sense of rapport. Ellickson (1980) found that only her male subjects were more at ease when their predicates were matched.

Other studies question the validity of the NLP model. Carbonnell (1986) determined PRS through videotapes of eye movements and found that subjects did not rate interviewers who matched their PRS any more favorably than those who mismatched. Graunke and Roberts (1985) provide further evidence that PRS is not a useful concept and that people change their predicates in different situations. Umansky's (1984) and Coe and Scharcoff's (1985) studies also question the PRS construct. Schneider (1984) found that matching predicates did not affect ratings of counselor empathy.

Some studies seem to directly contradict

each other. For example, Green (1979) found that matching predicates did not increase subject-experimenter trust as measured by Jourard's Questionnaire for Measuring Trust Between Subjects and Experimenters. However, Brockman (1980) used Jourard's Willingness to Disclose Questionnaire, the Barrett-Lennard Relationship Inventory (BLRI) and other standard psychological instruments to compare a counselor who matched predicates with one who used a generic human relations approach for empathy. The counselor who matched was perceived as more empathic by subjects and judges and was preferred by clients, but did not elicit a greater willingness to self disclose. The only instrument that failed to show results was Jourard's.

Paxton (1980) found the most interesting disconfirming results in that both matching and consistently mismatching the client's PRS improved the client's perception of the relationship more than non-matching. Non-matching consisted of frequently changing the mode of predicates used.

We do not discuss the studies where subjects listen and rate a tape of a counselor matching or mismatching predicates because, although some

(Asbell,1983) appear to support NLP and others (Cody,1983) do not, NLP does not predict that a person who watches a therapist match a client's predicates would rate the therapist as more trustworthy (Hammer,1983).

Among the more sophisticated studies are those of Hammer (1983), Shobin (1980) and Frieden (1981). Hammer pointed out that tracking and matching individual predicates was more likely to produce rapport than only using the predicates of a person's PRS. For example, suppose Jim classified Anita as an auditory. Anita also occasionally uses visual and kinesthetic predicates. When Jim responded to Anita's visual words with auditory predicates, he is mismatching her. Hammer's counselors tracked individual predicates and matched them. Results measured by a revised form of the BLRI showed an increased perceived empathy. Shobin (1980) found that matching predicates facilitated rapport and that it was more important than matching voice tone or voice tempo. Frieden's (1981) study of two clients found no improvement in global "relationship" indices as measured by the BLRI when he matched predicates.

He also found increased head-to-head distance, a finding thought to reflect a decrease in rapport. However, he did find that matching increased eye contact.

In direct contradiction to Hammer and Shobin are Dowd and Hingst (1983) whose therapists tracked and matched, tracked and mismatched or proceeded in their usual fashion, oblivious to matching or mismatching. They found no significant differences among the three conditions. The nonsignificant results show the no match group experiencing the most empathy, followed by the matched group. The relatively inexperienced therapists who matched or mismatched had a bug-in-the-ear device which observers used to correct them when they deviated from the prescribed response. The no match group was told to proceed in their usual fashion. Dowd and Hingst (1983) admit that the higher ratings of the no match group may be explained by the fact that those therapists could be more spontaneous.

So we are left with many studies that often contradict each other. Of the more sophisticated track and match studies, two support the NLP hypotheses, one has mixed results and one refutes

NLP. With such results, it would be important if some consistent support for the tracking and matching hypothesis emerged. Our study hypothesized that tracking and matching (as compared with mismatching) predicates would increase client perception of rapport as measured by (1) the BLRI Empathic Understanding and Level of Regard Scales (1963) and (2) the Session Evaluation Questionnaire (Stiles, 1980). And in fact, our results do add some consistency to the confused literature.

Subjects. Subjects for the study were 24 volunteers. Although, for reasons explained below, eight subjects' responses were eliminated from the pool, leaving a total N of sixteen for the study. They were drawn from a group of licensed practical nursing students doing a two-week rotation through a mental health center, from professional colleagues and clerical staff of the mental health center where one of the authors was employed, and from graduate and undergraduate students who responded to an advertisement on the wall of a college classroom building. All agreed to participate after a brief description of the purpose of the

study: "We are going to investigate some of the interpersonal processes that occur between therapist and client." There were sixteen female and eight male subjects. Sharpley (1984) complains that most research on PRS generalizes from research conducted on the young "mostly aged 18 - 25" (p.247) and therefor do not represent the age range of the subjects a therapist usually faces. However, our subjects ranged in age from twenty-one to forty-nine. All subjects agreed to participate voluntarily. The only benefit gained from participation was the analogue therapy sessions themselves.

Four therapists participated in the study. Three were doctoral students in counseling psychology who had completed at least one doctoral level practicum and had the equivalent of at least two years minimum, full-time mental health work. The fourth therapist was a graduate student in social work. He also had a Masters degree in pastoral counseling and had counseled for his church at least the equivalent of two years full time work. All counselors were familiar with NLP matching procedures and had independently begun to experiment with them in their own work.

Design. After agreeing to participate in the study, subjects were scheduled for two half-hour analogue therapy sessions. Subjects were assigned counselors with only such practical considerations as time availability and location being determining factors. Subjects had no previous contact with any of their counselors.

Following counselor assignment, subjects were randomly assigned to one of two possible treatment session sequences. In one group, clients were given two half-hour analog therapy sessions in which the therapist systematically matched their predicates in the first session and mismatched them during the second. The other group received the opposite order; that is, the therapist mismatched during the first session and matched during the second. In the match condition, the counselor made a concerted effort to match the predicates spoken by the client in terms of the sensory modality implied by their predicate choice. That is, if the subject used visual predicates, the counselor spoke in visual terms. The counselor responded to auditory predicates with auditory predicates and kinesthetic predicates

with kinesthetic predicates. Predicates were tracked and matched on an on-going basis. In the mismatch condition, the opposite procedure occurred. The therapist noted the modality implied by the subjects' predicates and consistently commented back to them in another modality.

To ensure that the match or mismatch procedure had been accurately administered, trained judges listened to audio tapes of the sessions and discarded those failing to meet the established criterion. In order for a tape to be included in the data analysis group, two trained judges who sampled ten interactions (minimally) for each half-hour session, had to find an eighty percent accuracy rate for the "match' or "mismatch" condition. After scoring, the judges removed eight subjects from the final pool, leaving a total N of sixteen. We believed this to be less intrusive way than the bug-in-the-ear device to ensure that the predicates are consistently matched.

At the end of each session, clients filled out the Session Evaluation Questionnaire (Stiles, 1980) and the BLRI's Empathic Understanding and Level of Regard Scales (1963). The BLRI has often been used in both published and unpublished

NLP rapport research.

Results. Means and standard deviations were computed for the total match and total mismatch groups on each of the five dependent measures. The samples were then compared by analyzing the differences between the means on each dependent measure through use of the t test for correlated samples. A significant difference between groups was found on the BLRI's Empathic Understanding Scale ($t + 2.28$ df $+14$, $p=.05$). This supports the NLP hypothesis as measured by empathy but not as measured by any of the remaining indices of rapport.

The findings fail to support the hypotheses in terms of increased perception of the therapist's Level of Regard or improved showing on the Depth/Value, Smoothness/Ease or Positive Feeling indices at the .05 level. However, two of the measures, the Positive Feelings Index and the Smoothness/Ease Index of the Session Evaluation Questionnaire, showed trends in the hypothesized direction.

Overall, we interpret our findings as supporting the idea that systematic tracking and matching

(versus mismatching) of a client's sensory predicates improves the client's perception of the empathic component of rapport in the therapist. This is consistent with the findings of two previous studies (Brockman, 1980; Hammer, 1983).

Discussion. As noted, the significant relationship occurred on the Empathic Understanding Scale of BLRI. Results suggest that about 12% of the variance of this score was attributable to the matching. At first glance, this may appear to be a relatively weak relationship. However, authors who have devised methods to partition the components of variance attributable to stable therapist, client, and particular client X therapist dyads (Howard et al., 1976) find that once you have accounted for these "givens" only about 60% of the variance remains to be divided up between the within therapist factors (i.e. how the therapist was on a particular day); the within client factors (i.e., how the client was on a particular day and the topic discussed), and the particular client X therapist session itself. Given these constraints, the matching variable is quite potent for influencing as much of the variance of the Empathy measure as it did.

One explanation for the result on this scale could be that when a therapist consistently matches the sensory mode of the clients, there is a greater probability of their feeling heard and understood with precision. When there is an equivalent response in another mode, the client must "translate" the therapist's words into the modality he is "in" in order to determine if the response fits with his experience. This translation maneuver only takes a moment, but it interrupts the client's flow of emotion and thought and requires some energy to "bring the therapist along." Such a procedure is not likely to engender in the client a feeling that the therapist is closely attuned to his or her inner processes. It does not, therefore, contribute to a sense of being empathically understood.

The measures that showed no significant differences appear to be responsive to more global aspects of the client-therapist relationship such that matching or mismatching alone had no significant impact. For example, the Depth/Value Index, separates those sessions felt to be deep, valuable, full, special and good from those seen

as shallow, worthless, empty, ordinary and bad. It is hard to think of any subtle interpersonal process which would consistently impact this variable significantly.

The informal, qualitative results are some of the most interesting. Every counselor mentioned that mismatching was difficult and distressful, especially when faced with a client in real pain. This could have happened because they knew the hypotheses, but part of it seemed to be a genuine, almost kinesthetic intuition experienced by the counselors that their behavior was somehow pushing the client away or blocking contact. Also it is noteworthy that the two clients who dropped out of the study were mismatch subjects.

When a therapist mismatched a predicate, some clients continually switched to the modality implied by this predicate in their next sentence. This "follow the leader" phenomena may shed light on Paxton's (1980) finding that it is better to stick with a modality (whether or not it is the client's PRS) than to continually use a variety of modalities. Perhaps the client experiences frequent shifting of modalities as mildly aversive.

Interesting also was that some clients seemed particularly stuck in their PRS. When these clients were matched, it was easy to establish rapport because they seemed particularly sensitive to noting that the counselor was "speaking their language". When mismatched, they did not adapt as readily.

The appearance of these two classes of clients suggest the addition of a theoretical distinction to the representational system model: Flexible/Rigid. This dimension would describe the degree to which one is capable or incapable of moving from one representational system to another. Grinder and Bandler have suggested that the amount of choice a client experiences in any given situation is partly a function of the degree to which they have represented the situation across different modalities. For example, if someone has an understanding of the situation represented only kinesthetically, they may feel they are in a bind, and not see any other possible perspectives. If on the other hand, their experience is represented in all modalities, they have a greater number of perceived options available; literally having a

number of different ways of "making sense" out of their predicament.

One therapist thought that intentionally mismatching in itself might occasionally be a very appropriate therapeutic maneuver which "opens up the client" to new ways of experiencing his or her problems, and moves the client from one who rigidly understands a problem only in kinesthetic terms, for instance, to one who is more flexible and can hear and see other options.

References

Asbell, H.C. (1983) Effects of reflection, probe and predicate matching on perceived counselor characteristics. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri.

Barrett-Lennard, G. T. (1962). Dimensions of therapist response as causal factors in therapeutic change. Psychological Monographs, 76(43, Whole No. 562).

Brockman, W.P. (1980) Empathy Revisited: The effect of representational system matching on certain counseling process and outcome variables. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, College of William and Mary, Virginia.

Carbonnel, D.A. (1986) Representational systems: An empirical approach to Neuro-Linguistic Programming. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, DePaul University.

Cody, S.G. (1983) The stability and impact of the primary representational system in neuro-linguistic programming: a critical examination. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Connecticut.

Coe, W.C. & Scharcoff, J.A. (1985) An empirical evaluation of the Neurolinguistic Programming

model. The International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, 33 (4), 310-318.

Dowd, E.T., & Hingst (1983) Matching therapists' predicates: An in vivo test of effectiveness. Perceptual and Motor Skills, 57, 207-210.

Dowd, E.T., & Pety, J. (1982) Effect of counselor predicate matching on perceived social influence and client satisfaction. The Journal of Counseling Psychology, 29, 206-209.

Ellickson, J.L. (1983) Representational systems and eye movements in an interview. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 30, 339-345.

Falzett, W.C. (1981) Matched versus unmatched primary representational systems and their relationship to perceived trustworthiness in a counseling analogue. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 28, 305-308.

French, W., & Bell, C. (1978) Organizational Development. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Frieden, F.P. (1981) Speaking the client's language: The effects of neuro-linguistic programming (predicate matching) on verbal and nonverbal behaviors in psychotherapy- A single case design. Ph.D. Dissertation,

Virginia Commonwealth University.

Graunke, B. & Roberts, T.K. (1985) Neuro-linguistic Programming: The impact of imagery tasks on sensory predicate usage. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 32 (4), 525-530.

Green, M.A. (1979) Trust as effected by representational system predicates. Ph.D. Dissertation, Ball State University.

Grinder, J. & Bandler, R. (1976) The structure of Magic II. Palo Alto, CA: Science & Behavior Books.

Hammer, A.L. (1983) Matching perceptual predicates: Effect on perceived empathy in a counseling analogue. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 30, 172- 179.

Howard, I.I., Orlinsky, D.E., & Perilstein, J. (1976) Contribution of therapists to patients' experience in psychotherapy: A components of variance model for analyzing process data. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 44, 520-526.

McCormick, D.W. Neurolinguistic Programming: A resource guide and review of the research. The 1984 Annual: Developing Human Resources E. Pfeiffer and L. Goodstein eds. San Diego,

CA, University Associates, 1984. pp.267-281.

Palubeckas, A.J. (1981) Rapport in the therapeutic relationship and its relationship to pacing. Ed.D. Dissertation, Boston University School of Education.

Pantin, H.M. (1982) The relationship between subjects' predominant sensory predicate use, their preferred representational system and self-reported attitudes towards similar versus different therapist-patient dyads. Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Miami.

Paxton, H.M. (1980) Representational systems and client perception of the counseling relationship. Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University.

Schneider, M.E. (1984) The relationship among primary representational systems, and counselor empathy, trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertness and subject preference. Ph.D. Dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo.

Sharpley, C.F. (1984) Predicate Matching in NLP: A review of research on preferred representational system. Journal of Counseling Psychology, 31, 238-248.

Shaw, D.L.(1977) Recall as effected by the interaction of presentation representational system and primary representational system. Doctoral dissertation, Ball State University.

Shobin, M.Z. (1980) An investigation of the effect of verbal pacing on initial therapeutic rapport. Doctoral Dissertation, Boston University.

Stiles, W.B. (1980) Measurement of the impact of psychotherapy sessions. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 48, 176-185.

Umansky, D. L. (1984) The use of metaphoric language in relaxation training. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara.